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USA

State of the Resistance

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A BIG, BEAUTIFUL popular resistance is trickling up to some of the sites of political power, including the federal courts — although not fast or far enough, by a long shot. That’s been the important takeaway from the first 100-plus days of the Trump administration. But we’re barely at the beginning of what will be a long battle with ups and downs.

The [June 14 “No Kings” rallies](#) were both cheeky and inspirational. An estimated five million people turned out, importantly not only in big but also smaller cities and towns, as the Trump/MAGA assault threatens to squeeze the life out of rural as well as urban America.

A powerful report from the Tempest Collective, [“The battle of Los Angeles”](#) chronicles the early days of the immigration defense and resistance there. At the same time, the Trump regime is ramping up the repressive apparatus. Threats are proliferating against leftwing and movement forces, and more National Guard and illegal military troop mobilizations may be coming to suppress protests and defense of immigrant communities living under a reign of terror. Unleashing enough fear leads to self-deportation.

Added to all of this are acts of pure sadism and cruelty, such as state bans on gender-affirming care for youth, which have now been sanctioned by the U.S. Supreme Court.

It may often seem that protest marches and rallies, petitions, showing up at town halls, or all the other activist possibilities available (without holding levers of power), are useless because those at the top aren’t listening. But that’s partly because they want people to think they aren’t listening.

Without popular anger and revulsion bubbling up from below, there wouldn’t be nearly so many court rulings slowing down the administration’s obscene violations of law, the refusal of a few companies like COSTCO to wipe out their remaining DEI programs, or the (inadequate) response to its drive to turn academic centers like Harvard into Trump University.

Elsewhere in this issue we discuss the mixed-at-best response of university administrations to the Trump attacks, such as the “premature capitulation” by the University of Michigan and the police-state atmosphere on that campus. And while Harvard, with its show of resistance, has become the darling of liberal media, the university preemptively gutted its Center for Middle Eastern Studies and purged its faculty leadership. This was an attempt at surrender, which the Trump gang ignores as it openly seeks to destroy Harvard as an example to others.

As the Chronicle of Higher Education among others has pointed out, it’s fatal to compromise about Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (like Harvard agreeing with Trump that there are “excesses”). DEI is basically about removing obstacles to equality, while the Trump approach is about normalizing inequality as natural and acceptable.

In short, the protests so far aren’t remotely enough to meet the five-alarm social and political emergency we face — but they do help reveal that activism matters. The courageous Columbia students at graduation, defying the appalling new interim university president with chants of “Free Mahmoud,” set an example that echoes through the country and globally. The decades-long isolation of Palestinian rights from progressive politics has been broken — a big advance, even though the Democratic Party national leadership disgracefully refuses to touch the issue.

In exploring here the state of the resistance and its prospects, we won’t overstate what it’s accomplished or overlook

its shortcomings. It hasn't sidelined the hulking blob in the White House, or the nitwit with the famous family name in charge of wrecking Health and Human Services and bringing back measles, polio and other childhood epidemics.

The resistance so far hasn't prevented the genocidal destruction and starvation of Gaza at the hands of Israel and the United States, or the bipartisan complicity of the U.S. Congress. But it has broken through the media near-blackout of the horror in Palestine, and increased public dismay over Israel's blockade-and-starvation strategy.

Resistance hasn't stopped the mass-deportation horror hanging over immigrant communities, with heartbreaking consequences, although community activism in some cities and states has noticeably slowed the momentum and annoyed the managers of the police-state operations. (The danger of crippling the agriculture, construction and hotel industries has caused factional debate among the Trump/MAGA gangsters.)

It gave space for courts to challenge the kidnap-and-rendition of Kilmar Ábrego Garcia to a Salvadoran dungeon, which "shocks the conscience" as the district court judge Paula Xinis put it, because there are at least sectors of the public with a conscience to be shocked. That's why he was brought back to the United States — with the government filing trumped-up "trafficking" charges as a way of keeping him locked away from his family and keeping immigrant communities in perpetual fear.

Popular anger also makes an ongoing difference as equally horrifying cases come to light, including the peremptory deportation of migrants to places like South Sudan.

Why the Limitations?

That moral outrage is absolutely necessary, but equally essential is an understanding of why it's hard to derail the so-called Trump agenda.

First, much of it is a ruling-class agenda, or at least that of important sectors of the U.S. capitalist class. This comes through on consideration of Trump's big, barf-bag budget bill, adopted with a one-vote majority in the House of Representatives. (It's on the Senate agenda as this statement is being written.)

You might ask what's attractive to capital in a massive-deficit budget that points the country firmly on the long road to bankruptcy, in tariff wars that threaten to sink the bond market — and simultaneously in brutal cuts that will sink millions of Americans into poverty without health care, including in Trump country heartlands.

The business press, led by the Wall Street Journal, is savage in denouncing Trump's tariffs and their incoherent vacillations. But permanent tax cuts for the affluent and billionaires panders to the greed of these sectors, as does the ideological appeal of the "need for fiscal discipline" to slash Medicare, Medicaid, food assistance and essential services for the population. Tax cuts for the rich of course will balloon the deficit way beyond anything that can be paid for by the grotesque cruelties imposed on the majority.

As for the tariff debate, there's some valid imperial logic in the argument that for the United States to continue ruling the world — which is not our socialist agenda of course, but most definitely is the U.S. capitalist ambition — it needs reliable domestic industries in things like steel, aluminum, computer chips and semiconductors.

This hardly makes sense of tariffs on Central American bananas or Mexican avocados. And in view of the central

imperialist rivalry in the world between the United States and China, there is hardly a rational motivation for crippling tariffs on the United States' most important strategic allies in Europe, Australia and Canada.

Yet despite the incompetent muddles of Trump's economic nationalism and the destruction wrought by what economist Paul Krugman calls the "attack of the sadistic zombies" in the federal budget, there is a level of elite support for the core of the Republican program — especially indifference to the damage inflicted on immigrant and poor communities, Palestinians living and dying under genocide, and starving children in the Global South left adrift by the instant dismantling of U.S. aid.

Many of these same countries are now on Trump's expanded travel ban list, perhaps a bargaining chip for their accepting more people he plans to deport.

Second, and most important from a strategic perspective, the resistance to Trump is a large movement but fundamentally not yet a deeply class-rooted one. We see the central task of the left as the work of building the core of the working-class centered movement that's needed in the present emergency and in the long run.

To be more precise, there are most certainly large numbers of working-class people and families participating in the protest rallies and marches, but the institutions of organized labor and the African American community are generally not present. How to begin overcoming these obstacles requires additional discussion.

Needed: A Broad Class Movement

A striking expression of class solidarity is the support for Kilmar Ábrego Garcia by his sheet metal workers' union, SMART Local 100 in Maryland. SEIU California has rallied to the defense of its popular president [David Huerta](#), arrested and roughed up trying to protect migrant workers. These examples are only the beginning of what's needed.

The United Auto Workers endorsed the Hands Off! demonstrations of May 19, but we saw few if any signs of organizing members to turn out. On the contrary, UAW president Shawn Fain — who gave the union's endorsement in the 2024 presidential election to Kamala Harris, with no membership discussion or democratic decision-making — has turned around to support Trump's auto tariffs, a destructive break of solidarity with Canadian and Mexican autoworkers. (See "[A Setback for Auto Workers' Solidarity](#)", in our previous issue ATC 236 May-June 2025.)

Equally difficult is the fact that the Black community's struggle against the vicious racism of Trump's policies — the shredding of the federal work force, cancellation of consent decrees for police reform, forcibly wiping out DEI programs not only in government but throughout academia and corporate America, and much more — is critically important for the resistance but not adequately represented in the protest demonstrations.

In the April 5 and 19 Hands Off! demonstrations, African American participation appeared to be mostly low. This reflects the general weakness of union involvement and probably inadequate outreach to Black community and faith-based institutions. The leadership shown by Rev. William Barber of the New Poor Peoples Campaign demonstrates the potential for a mass movement that could be a diverse and more powerful resistance force.

Understandably, participation by immigrant communities under threats of arbitrary detention and pe-remptory deportation will likely remain limited until there's a qualitatively larger resistance capable of protecting them.

Moving Forward in the Crisis

The everywhere-all-at-once, multi-front quality of Trump's far-right assaults makes them daunting. How is it possible to respond when there are new atrocities, not to mention what in "normal" times would be multiple impeachable presidential offenses, every single day?

At the same time, the potential for a more powerful resistance is carried in the very fact that Trump, the extreme right, and the "sadistic zombies" are attacking every sector of the working class, although not evenly, and although many working-class people don't yet recognize it.

Popular anger will grow as the full impact of the budget-cut atrocities, tariff idiocies and austerity begin hitting millions of people, including many who haven't recognized that they would be among the targeted victims. The possibility of a "stagflation" staring us in the face.

Some kind of political explosion is looming in the United States — although whether it takes the form of a more powerful resistance, fragmented responses, or possibly reactionary and racist mobilizations is an open question — and will be influenced in part by how today's movement and those of us on the left confront the growing crisis.

We stated at the outset that popular anger and revulsion is "trickling upward" to the courts and elite institutions. While those are good things as far as they go, they do not mean that the decisive battles will be fought at the top, or that the movement can look to the Democratic Party establishment for solutions.

Much less can we wait and hope for the outcome of the 2026 midterm elections (where Democrats in their usual noisy triumphal arrogance are already predicting victory without saying what they intend to do with it).

The path forward, as the crisis intensifies, must be helping bringing together the sectors and struggles at the grassroots into common cause — broadly speaking, a united front of the working class in all its diversity. By no stretch of fantasy do we suggest that the socialist left in the United States can pull this off on our own. But building on June 14, our central responsibility is to contribute to this effort toward the biggest and most effective resistance.

Source: [July-August 2025, ATC 237](#).

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